

ITALY AND THE ISLAMIC WORLD

ALI HUMAYUN AKHTAR

EDINBURGH

ITALY AND THE ISLAMIC WORLD

From Caesar to Mussolini

ALI HUMAYUN AKHTAR



'This book is an ambitious and innovative work of transnational history. Its careful scholarship is enhanced by impressive documentation in both European and Islamic languages (Italian, French, Arabic and Turkish), full of kaleidoscopic and arresting detail. Time and again, the author demonstrates how the interface between Orient and Occident surprised, fascinated and enriched both cultures.'

Carole Hillenbrand, University of Edinburgh

'*Italy and the Islamic World* distils an expansive body of scholarship and research into an engaging and accessible narrative that illustrates the centrality and the enduring impact of Italy's long and fruitful relationship with the Islamic world from Imperial Rome to Fascist Italy and beyond.'

Eric Dursteler, Brigham Young University

Uncovers the Italian peninsula's legacy as a bridge between Europe, North Africa and the Middle East

From ancient times to the 20th century, Italy has linked Europe to the marketplaces of the Middle East and North Africa. Beginning with the fall of Ancient Rome and the rise of the Papal State, travelling through the Renaissance and the rise of the Italian Republic, Ali Humayun Akhtar tells the stories of Pisan, Genoese, Venetian, Florentine and Livornese merchants and diplomats as they navigated cultural difference in pursuit of commerce and adventure.

Painting a colourful picture of the connections between the Italian peninsula and the Islamic world, Akhtar brings two millennia of Italy's trading history to life – and sheds light on Europe's current debates over trade, society and the links between West and East.

Ali Humayun Akhtar is the author of *1368: China and the Making of the Modern World* (2022). He is Professor of Global History & Islamic Arts and Humanities and a faculty member in the Hillary Clinton Center for Women's Empowerment at Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane (AUI), as well as a Visiting Scholar of International Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Cover image: *The Doge Marino Grimani receiving the Ambassador of Persia*. Painting by Carlo (Carletto) Calari and Gabriele Calari, 1595 © ak-images / Cameraphoto.

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For my family and my students



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TIMELINE

476	Odoacer captures Rome	14
732	Battle of Tours	15
751	collapse of the Exarchate of Ravenna	16
756	establishment of an independent Papal State	17
800	coronation of Frankish King Charlemagne in Rome as <i>Imperator Romanorum</i>	18
843	Frankish empire begins to fracture	19
921	selection of Mahdia (Tunisia) as the first capital of the Fatimid Empire	20
961	establishment of Cairo by the Fatimid Empire	21
1053	Pope Leo IX confirms authority of Bishop Thomas of Carthage across North African dioceses	22
1054	Catholic–Orthodox schism	23
1056	Saxon king Heinric (Henry) IV becomes king at the age of six, with his mother Empress Agnes as regent	24
1063	failed Pisan attempt to capture the Emirate of Sicily	25
1071	Roger becomes first Norman ruler of Sicily	26
1075	papacy issues a compilation of twenty-seven statements, known as the <i>Dictatus Papae</i> , confirming its authority	27

- 1 1076 Pope excommunicates Saxon king during growing clash between
- 2 royal and clerical authority
- 3 1081 Heinric (Henry) IV invades Rome
- 4 1096 Crusaders invade eastern Roman and Muslim-held territories
- 5 1063 construction of Cathedral of Pisa begins
- 6 1087 invasion of Mahdia (Tunisia) by the papacy, Pisans, Genoese
- 7 1088 Frankish Margravine Matilda oversees appointment of Daimbert
- 8 (Dagobert) as bishop of Pisa
- 9 1099 Sicilian Norman King Roger II's first cousin Bohemond enters
- 10 Jerusalem
- 11 1099 Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem is established
- 12 1101 Genoese send squadron of ships in support of Baldwin, Lord of
- 13 Edessa and King of Jerusalem
- 14 1115 Pisan–Catalan joint force captures Ibiza and reaches Denia on the
- 15 Alicante coast
- 16 1116 Pisans lose Ibiza and Balearic territories to the rising Almoravids
- 17 1125 Pisan *Majorcan Book of the Deeds of the Illustrious Pisans* is completed
- 18 1133 Pisans secure trade agreement with Almoravids
- 19 1136 Pisan–Genoese force captures Algerian port of Annaba (Bône)
- 20 1137 King Roger II sends Arabic-language letter to Fatimid caliph al-Hafiz
- 21 confirming relations
- 22 1137 King Roger II captures Gerba from the Fatimids
- 23 1149 Genoese conclude a trade-oriented ten-year peace agreement with
- 24 Ibn Mardanish of the Balearics
- 25 1150 Pisans secure trade relations with Ibn Mardanish
- 26 1154 Pisan ambassador Ranieri Botacci goes to Fatimid Cairo to negotiate
- 27 a trade deal
- 28 1157 Pisans return to Mahdia to secure a trade agreement with rising
- 29 Almohad caliphate
- 30 1161 Genoese secure trade relations with the Almohads based on a likely
- 31 earlier agreement in 1053
- 32
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1164	Saladin first arrives in Cairo from the Levant to work for the Fatimid caliphs	1 2
1171	Saladin's coup of the Fatimid government in Cairo	3
1182	Pisan vessels are among the ships that breach Saladin's naval siege of Beirut	4 5 6
1186	expansion of Pisan–Almohad trade relations	7
1187	Saladin captured Jerusalem just prior to the Third Crusade (1189–1192)	8 9
1187	Conrad of Montferrat, ruler of Tyre, grants Pisa extraterritorial jurisdiction over Pisan citizens	10 11
1250	Mamluks, a Turkish mercenary dynasty, overthrow Saladin's Ayyubid government in Cairo	12 13
1267	Genoese help to re-install Byzantine rule in Crusader-held Constantinople	14 15 16
1272	Marco Polo observes advanced rudders on ships in Hormuz	17
1273	Pera across the Golden Horne in Constantinople is given to the Genoese	18 19
1278	Nasrids of Granada grant the Genoese the right to trade inland, a fondaco, a church, and tax privileges	20 21
1289	Genoese notary Pietro Battifoglio writes an account of Tunis noting the Italian presence	22 23
1304	Florentine chronicler Giovanni Villani observes Mediterranean shipwrights emulating Basque ships	24 25 26
1346	Genoese Simone Vignoso captures Chios and the two ports of Phokaia from the Byzantines	27 28
1355	Genoese diplomats Filippo Demerode and Bonifacio da Sori work as agents of the Ottoman sultan	29 30
1453	Ottoman capture of Constantinople	31
1532	Charles V signs a peace agreement with Protestant princes against the backdrop of Ottoman invasions	32 33
1541	Decree of the Venetian senate allowing Portuguese and Levantine Jews to settle in the city	34 35

- 1 1555 Pisaro's charter offers commercial privileges to five groups: Turks,
2 Armenians, Greeks, "Moors," Jews
- 3 1586 Medici Oriental Press creates Arabic type for printing presses
- 4 1593 Ferdinando de Medici declares Livorno, close to Florence, a "free"
5 port to attract foreign merchants
- 6 1597 Polish king Sigismund III finalizes capitulation agreement with the
7 Ottomans detailing trade relations
- 8 1601 Ferdinando allows Greeks to establish a Greek church, La Santissima
9 Annunziata on Via della Madonna
- 10 1608 Ferdinando de Medici battles an Ottoman fleet despite positive trade
11 relations
- 12 1649 Livorno's first Hebrew-language printing press is established, called
13 *La Stamperia del Kaf Nachat*
- 14 1795 French establish the Batavian republic in place of the Dutch republic
- 15 1814 Congress of Vienna: assembly in 1814–1815 of the four Great
16 Powers (Austria, Great Britain, Russia, Prussia) negotiate European
17 boundaries
- 18 1830 France annexes Algiers
- 19 1848 Grand Duke Leopold II agrees to a constitution with shared
20 governance
- 21 1861 Italian kingdom is established
- 22 1881 France annexes Tunis
- 23 1923 establishment of the Republic of Turkey out of the Ottoman Empire
- 24 1946 establishment of the Republic of Italy out of the Kingdom of Italy
- 25 1952 establishment of the Republic of Egypt out of the Kingdom of Egypt

GLOSSARY

Aachen:	one of the capitals of Charlemagne's Frankish empire on the borders of present-day France and Germany, also known in French today as Aix-la-Chappelle
abbot:	an ecclesiastical title for the heads of monasteries, which were sites of socioreligious leadership throughout the Italian peninsula and France that helped recenter Rome and the bishop of Rome (the pope) in regional politics after the fall of Rome (c. 476)
Adriatic Sea:	the northernmost portion of the Mediterranean Sea separating the Italian peninsula from the Balkans and Greek isles
Adrianopolis	one-time capital of the Ottoman sultanate (Turkish: Edirne) in the Thracian region separating present-day Greece and Turkey, named originally after Roman Emperor Hadrian
Almohads:	a confederation of Berber tribes that captured various Islamic polities in Iberia and North Africa and that eventually lost territory to the Castilian kingdom

1	Anatolia:	the peninsula that makes up present-day Turkey
2		and that was once the heartland of the eastern half
3		of the Roman Empire (Byzantine Empire)
4	Ancona:	port city on the eastern coast of the Italian penin-
5		sula under the authority of the Rome- based Papal
6		State and site of exchange with merchants from the
7		Ottoman Empire
8	antipope:	the title of a series of senior clerical figures in the
9		Roman Catholic Church who claimed the title of
10		pope in opposition to a concurrently serving pope
11		during the heyday of political tension associated with
12		the German kingdom's power over the Papal State
13	Antwerp:	center of Dutch commerce and exchange con-
14		nected with trade routes along the Baltic, North,
15		and Mediterranean seas
16	Aragon:	the kingdom and later Spanish province that was
17		the site of extensive commercial exchange with the
18		Italian maritime republics
19	archbishop:	the ecclesiastical title associated with a higher-
20		ranking bishop
21	Arsenale:	the Venetian word for the site where the Republic
22		mass-produced merchant galleys and war galleys
23	Babylonians:	inhabitants of the ancient state of Babylonia
24		based in the city of Babylon in Iraq and one-time
25		home of influential kings Hammurabi and Nebu-
26		chadnezzar
27	Balearics:	the islands off the eastern coast of Spain, including
28		Mallorca, that were the site of several Muslim and
29		Catholic frontier kingdoms
30	Benadetti (Tommaso):	Italian nationalist and follower of Mussolini born
31		in Alexandria (Khedivate of Egypt) at a time when
32		clashing pro- and anti-Fascist factions lived in the
33		Italian diaspora
34		
35		

Beyoglu:	district of Istanbul adjacent to historical Pera	1
bishopric:	the rank or office of a bishop in the Roman Catholic Church as well as the district under the bishop's ecclesiastical jurisdiction	2 3 4
Björgvin:	present-day Bergen (Norway) and one of a series of cities along the North and Baltic seas	5 6
Bohemond I of Antioch:	son of Norman adventurer Robert Guiscard of Apulia and Calabria (brother of Count of Sicily Roger) and his first wife, Alberada of Buonalbergo	7 8 9 10
Brescia:	city in present-day Lombardy that, despite being outside Veneto, was captured by the Republic of Venice and became intertwined with the pilgrimage routes through Venice	11 12 13 14
Bristol:	city in England connected with trade to Livorno in fish, cloth, and other British commodities	15 16
Byzantine:	modern English-language term used to identify the surviving eastern half of the Roman Empire that, after the fall of Rome in 476, was identified in various languages as the land of the "Romans" and "Greeks"	17 18 19 20
caesar:	Roman imperial title with origins in the persona and name of Julius Caesar with parallels in the way that the Frankish title Carolus draws on the legacy of Charlamagne (Latin: Carolus Magnus)	21 22 23 24 25
Carolingian:	Frankish dynasty named after Charlemagne (Carolus Magnus), grandson of Charles Martel (Carolus Martellus)	26 27 28
Castile:	present-day Spanish province named after the medieval and early modern kingdom that variously captured, annexed, and united with neighboring kingdoms (for example, Emirate of Granada, Crown of Aragon) in the formation of the Age of Exploration-era Crowns of Castile and Aragon across all of present-day Spain	29 30 31 32 33 34 35

1	cathedral:	the primary church associated with an ecclesiastical
2		diocese of the Roman Catholic Church
3	Cervantes (Miguel de):	an early Castilian-language (Spanish-language) nov-
4		elist and author of the influential <i>Don Quixote</i>
5	Ceuta:	one of two major Spanish-held ports on the coast
6		of Africa adjacent to Morocco and close to British-
7		held Gibraltar
8		
9	Chalcedon:	ancient eastern Roman town south of Scutari
10		(present-day Üsküdar) that was the site of the
11		Council of Chalcedon and is currently located in
12		Istanbul's Kadıköy district
13	Charlemagne:	Frankish ruler known in Latin as Carolus Magnus
14		who governed during the height of the Frankish
15		empire
16	Cleopatra:	ruler of Egypt (50–30 BCE) and paternal descen-
17		dant of General Ptolemy, Macedonian general of
18		Alexander the Great
19		
20	Cluny:	a city in France northwest of Lyon that was the
21		center of monastic reform since 909, when Abbot
22		Berno sought to adhere more strictly to Benedic-
23		tine rule and follow more closely the leadership of
24		the pope to the exclusion of local kings and nobles
25	Constantinople:	second capital of the Roman Empire after Rome
26		and, following the capture of Rome, sole Roman
27		capital until its capture by the Ottomans in 1453
28	consul:	ancient title for the heads of the Roman Republic
29		elected by the Senate centuries before the term was
30		used for ambassadors of the Italian republics
31		
32	Copenhagen:	city in Denmark and major center of Baltic Sea
33		exchange during the heyday of the Hanseatic League
34	Cosimo de' Medici:	Florentine banker and namesake of the Medici
35		dynasty that ruled Florence and the Duchy of

	Tuscany from the late 1300s until the era of Napoleon in the late 1700s	1 2
corsairs:	privateers or independent maritime adventurers who worked under the patronage of various Mediterranean powers from the 1500s to the 1700s, and lived a pirate-like existence in the world of maritime commerce and conflict	3 4 5 6 7 8
Crimea:	peninsula in the northern Black Sea just off the coast of present-day mainland Ukraine (north) and Russia (northeast), once the heartland of the Crimean khanate	9 10 11 12
Cristobal Colón:	Spanish-language name of Genoese mariner Christopher Columbus and namesake of the Portuguese and Spanish nobility associated with his son and one-time governor of Hispaniola island (present-day Haiti and Dominican Republic) Diego Colón	13 14 15 16 17
Ctesiphon:	principal capital of the Sassanian empire adjacent to ancient Hellenistic Seleukia (Aramaic: Saliq) located on the outskirts of present-day Baghdad	18 19 20 21
Darius:	Achaemenid emperor during the empire's height and namesake of later successor Darius III, who lost much of the empire's western territories in Anatolia just across the Greek isles to Alexander the Great	22 23 24 25
Deccan:	plateau across the central geography of the Indian subcontinent that was the center of several sultanates (the Deccan sultanates) later subsumed into the Mughal Empire	26 27 28 29
denarius:	a standard Roman silver coin and namesake of a related coin known in Arabic as the <i>dinar</i>	30 31
dhow:	ancient Arab trading vessel that transferred commodities such as porcelain between China and Iraq across the Indian Ocean and South China Sea	32 33 34 35

1	Diego Colón:	son of Christopher Columbus and one-time gov-
2		ernor of Hispaniola (present-day Haiti and the
3		Dominican Republic)
4	doges:	title used throughout the Italian peninsula for the
5		elected ruler of several republics (for example, the
6		Republic of Venice, Republic of Genoa) with ori-
7		gins in the military title <i>dux</i> (English: duke) in the
8		ancient Roman Republic
9	dragoman:	diplomat and translator (Arabic: <i>tarjuman</i> , Italian:
10		<i>turcimanno</i>) typically in European service able to
11		represent their home governments in the Middle
12		East and North Africa using their skills in language
13		and cultural literacy
14	Dubrovnik:	capital of the Republic of Ragusa in present-day
15		Croatia, formerly a crossroads of Slavic languages
16		and the Romanian-like Dalmatian language along
17		the Ancona–Dubrovnik–Istanbul trade routes
18	duchy:	a dynastic monarchy led by an unelected duke
19		(Italian: doge) that could be seen in the example of
20		the Medici-led Duchy of Tuscany
21	duomo:	an Italian term for “cathedral” that is used most
22		famously in the English language for the cathedral
23		of Florence
24	earthenware:	a broad term for ancient varieties of glazed or
25		unglazed pottery, including terracotta, that are
26		made impervious to water through glazes and that
27		have lower mechanical strength than stoneware,
28		porcelain, and bone china
29	Elagabalus:	name of an ancient Arabian deity (Arabic: <i>ilah al-</i>
30		<i>jabal</i> , “deity of the mountains”) and the name of a
31		Roman emperor of the Severan dynasty descended
32		from Septimius Severus of Lepta (Libya) and Julia
33		Domna of Edessa (Syria)
34		
35		

exarchate:	a territorial province of the surviving eastern Roman Empire that the emperor in Constantinople created to replace the various civil diocese of the former western Roman territories upon Constantinople's capture of those lands from the Visigoths, Ostrogoths, and Vandals	1 2 3 4 5 6
excommunication:	an action, most famously used by the Roman Catholic Church, that officially excludes someone from participating in the services and sacraments of the Church	7 8 9 10
extraterritorial:	a description usually for laws or rights that citizens of one territory are able to secure in another territory based on the second territory's extraterritorial agreements with the first territory	11 12 13 14 15
Fatimid:	the descriptive title of a North African Muslim dynasty that founded Cairo on the outskirts of the early Muslim garrison town known as Fustat, which in turn was established close to ancient Memphis	16 17 18 19 20
Flanders:	coastal region central to Hanseatic League exchange on the borders of present-day Belgium and the Netherlands across the North Sea from the British Isles	21 22 23 24
fondaco:	the Venetian variety of a hotel or inn for visiting merchants from places like the Ottoman Empire	25 26
Gabès:	Tunisian coastal city that was at the crossroads of Norman, Almohad, and later Ottoman politics	27 28
Futurism:	a literary, artistic, and intellectual movement oriented around not only imagining the innovations and technologies of the future	29 30 31
Gagliano:	the name of two brothers of Italian descent with an ability to move between Venetian and Ottoman subjecthood	32 33 34 35

1	Gattilusio:	a powerful Genoese family on a par with the Giustiniani family that, like the Giustinianis, controlled
2		parts of the northern Aegean including the island
3		of Lesbos through an alliance with the eastern
4		Romans (Byzantines) in Constantinople
5		
6	geniza:	a general term for a storage area of older Hebrew-
7		language books and papers that, in the case of the
8		famous Cairo geniza, preserved medieval Arabic-
9		language documents in Hebrew script illustrative
10		of the life of Arabic-speaking Jews
11	Genoa:	city on the Italian peninsula's Ligurian coast that
12		was the center of the Genoese republic, one of sev-
13		eral Italian republics that emerged from the shadow
14		of Frankish German rule and eastern Roman
15		(Byzantine) rule in the Italian peninsula
16	Ghassanids:	an Arab Christian tribe that lived in and governed
17		part of the Levant region that was originally aligned
18		with the eastern Roman (Byzantine) empire before
19		changing alliance towards the rising Arab Muslims
20		
21	Giustiniani:	a prominent Genoese family on a par with the Gat-
22		tilusio family that controlled parts of the north-
23		ern Aegean through an alliance with the eastern
24		Romans (Byzantines) in Constantinople
25	Granada:	capital of the Emirate of Granada and, alongside
26		cities like Barcelona, a center of Genoese commer-
27		cial activity in the lead-up to the Age of Exploration
28	Habsburg:	German dynasty that came to prominence in the
29		1200s within the German Holy Roman Empire
30		and that, by the lifetime of Charles V, was closely
31		intertwined with Spanish and Portuguese royalty
32	Haracguzar:	a typically Christian or Jewish subject of the Otto-
33		man sultan, including Roman Catholics of Vene-
34		tian and Genoese heritage who, in the case of
35		

	individuals like the Gagliano brothers, were some-	1
	times able to move between Venetian and Ottoman	2
	subjecthood	3
Hafsid:	one of several dynasties in northwest Africa that	4
	traded with the Italian republics and that was sub-	5
	sumed into Almohad and later Ottoman territory	6
Hawran:	the North African city known in Spanish as Oran	7
		8
Heraclius:	eastern Roman emperor in the early 600s during	9
	the rise of Islam and a supporter of the cultural	10
	Hellenization of the eastern Roman administration	11
	especially by changing the administrative language	12
	from Latin to Greek	13
Ilkhanids:	the Mongol dynasty that ruled the southwestern-	14
	most portion of the Mongol Empire around Iran in	15
	the 1200s and 1300s	16
Ifriqiya:	the Arabic word for the portion of North Africa	17
	overlapping with much of coastal Tunisia, eastern	18
	Algeria, and the ancient Roman province of Africa	19
	Proconsularis	20
Inquisition:	a set of offices established throughout the Roman	21
	Catholic Church that, particularly in Iberia and the	22
	Americas, attempted to investigate and prosecute	23
	Catholics suspected of observing “Judaizing” (<i>judai-</i>	24
	<i>zante</i>) practices, Muslim customs, or any rituals or	25
	doctrines deemed a heresy (<i>herejía</i>)	26
		27
Latakia:	Syrian city under various eastern Roman (Byzan-	28
	tine), Arab, and Ottoman histories	29
Leghorn:	the English-language word for Livorno	30
Liguria:	the coastal region connecting present-day Monaco	31
	in the south of France with the northwestern coast	32
	of Italy including Genoa, where the Ligurian lan-	33
	guage (Genoese: Zeneize) is spoken	34
		35

1	Lombardy:	an administrative region in the Italian peninsula
2		with a name that stems from the Germanic king-
3		dom of the Lombards (<i>Regnum Longobardorum</i>)
4		that reigned throughout the Italian peninsula in
5		the aftermath of the Germanic conquests
6	Mamluk:	dynasty known as the Mamluk sultanate that gov-
7		erned Egypt and the Syrian Levant in the late medi-
8		eval and early modern eras (1250–1517 CE)
9	Marrakesh:	city in Morocco that was a historical center of
10		Atlantic and Mediterranean commercial exchange
11	Maronite:	description of the predominant Christian denomi-
12		nation of Lebanon
13	Mussolini (Benito):	former prime minister of Italy and head of the
14		National Fascist Party (PNF)
15		
16	Nabateans:	an Arabic-speaking nomadic north Arabian tribe
17		and kingdom that fell under Roman rule
18	Napoleon:	French ruler who rose to prominence during the
19		French Revolution
20		
21	Nasrid:	Arab dynasty of the Iberian peninsula known in
22		Arabic as Banu Nasr and, for much of its history
23		(r. 1230–1492), a vassal of the Castilian kingdom
24	Normans:	French-speaking adventurers and conquerors of
25		originally Norse-speaking Viking heritage that
26		established dynasties in England (Normandy),
27		the southern region of the Italian peninsula, and
28		Crusader-era Syria
29	Odoacer:	Germanic conqueror of imperial Rome and one-
30		time officer in the Roman army
31	Palaiologus:	eastern Roman ruler who was restored to rule by
32		the Genoese
33	Palmyra:	a city in present-day Syria that, like Petra in
34		Jordan, was one of several commercial cities
35		

	along north–south trade routes connecting the Levant with the Hejaz region in present-day Saudi Arabia	1 2 3
Podestà:	a Genoese term for Genoese ambassadors or consuls in centers such as Pera (district of present-day Istanbul), which the Genoese secured as an independently governed port in the aftermath of the restoration of eastern Roman (Byzantine) power in the formerly Crusader-held Constantinople (c. 1200s)	4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Protestants:	denomination of Christianity that grew out of the teachings of Roman Catholic clergy who protested certain political and theological trends associated with the early modern Roman Catholic Church	11 12 13 14 15 16
Ragusa (Republic of):	independent Roman Catholic republic that was situated across the Adriatic from the Italian republics (around present-day Croatia)	17 18 19
Ravenna:	city in the northern Italian peninsula that was once the center of the eastern Roman-held Exarchate of Ravenna	20 21 22
Risorgimento:	the nineteenth-century cultural and political movement oriented around Italian unification and culminating in the establishment of the Kingdom of Italy in 1861	23 24 25 26
Safavid:	a Persian dynasty of Turkish origins that governed much of present-day Iran from the 1500s to the 1700s (c. 1501–1736)	27 28 29 30
Samarqand:	center of Persian-speaking culture and commerce along the historical silk routes connecting commerce around the Black Sea with commerce in China	31 32 33
Saraybosna:	the official name of Sarajevo in Turkish during the city's four centuries of Ottoman rule	34 35

1	Sassanian:	ancient Iranian dynasty that ruled Iran (c. 224–651)
2		until its capture by the rising Islamic empires on the
3		eve of the global Umayyad caliphate's establishment
4		in Damascus (c. 661–750)
5	Tabriz:	northern Iranian city in the historically Turkish-
6		speaking regions bordering present-day Azerbaijan
7	Thalassocracy:	a seaborne empire or maritime empire with primar-
8		ily maritime domains similar to the Republic of
9		Genoa and Republic of Venice
10	Theodoric:	ruler of the combined Gothic realms following the
11		capture of imperial Rome
12	Umayyad:	Arab Muslim dynasty established in Damascus in 661
13	Vaballathus:	the Latin name minted on local coins of the son of
14		Zenobia, the Palmyrene queen who rebelled against
15		the eastern Romans and established an indepen-
16		dent empire
17	Valerian:	Roman emperor (c. 253–260) who was famously
18		captured by Persian emperor Shapur and repre-
19		sented on a Persian rock relief alongside future
20		Roman emperor Philip of Arabia Patraea, known by
21		later Roman writers for having potentially been the
22		first Christian Roman emperor prior to Constantine
23	Zengid:	Turkic Muslim dynasty with origins in present-
24		day southern Russia that crossed eastern Anatolia
25		into the Levant and Iraq and governed parts of the
26		region in alliance with the Seljuk dynasty during
27		the Crusader era until the eve of the Ottoman era
28	Zirid:	Muslim dynasty of Berber origin in North Africa,
29		especially present-day Tunisia, that established close
30		diplomatic and commercial connections with both
31		the Fatimid caliphate and the Norman kingdom
32	Zenobia:	Palmyrene queen who rebelled against the eastern
33		Romans and established an independent empire
34		
35		

SOURCES: TEXTS, OBJECTS, ARTS

How do historians know so much about Italy's connections with the Middle East and North Africa from the days of Caesar to Mussolini? Why is it a challenge for writers to organize this material in a way that elucidates key patterns and trends that have impacted the modern world? The simplest answer is evidence, and specifically evidence from a variety of sources: texts, objects, architecture, inscriptions, memory, and the like. The task for archivists, archaeologists, and historians is to sort through this large volume of evidence, discern fact from fiction, and interpret these facts according to questions about biography, how society is organized, cultural practices and beliefs, and political power. The result is a book of history, like this one, rooted in fields like sociology, anthropology, and political science with evidence from the Florentine archives, Ottoman archives, and more than a dozen international archival collections and museums.

But what happens when sources about the same event disagree? For historians, this problem is captured by the term historiography – that is, the study of how people in the past observed, recorded, and interpreted events. In the case of the current study, for example, writing a history of Italy's encounters with the Middle East and North Africa requires an analysis of how and why travelers—writing variously in Italian, French, Arabic, and Turkish—recorded and interpreted the same events differently. The outcome, this book,

illuminates not only the historiography of Italy, but also that of its maritime neighbors around the Mediterranean. And in the comparative story that this book recounts, Italy has as much to do with Western history as it does the worlds of the “East.” Today, Italians are coming to terms with this duality as they debate Italy’s place in Europe, and what the current study shows is that this debate has been in motion for 2,000 years.

The earliest sources used in this book are vestiges of the Roman Empire recorded in Latin. Among the most interesting are the many inscriptions, coins, and works of art that supplement what we can learn from Roman chronicles. In the case of Roman emperor Philip of Arabia, for example, the surviving Roman amphitheater in Philippopolis (Arabic: Shahba)—situated in the district of Auranitis (Arabic: Hawran)—illustrates the extent that southern Syria and Jordan were an important part of Roman politics on the eve of the establishment of Constantinople. The region remains dotted with Christian monasteries dating back to early Christianity, which contextualizes debates among Roman chroniclers about Philip’s possible Christian identity. Prior to Constantinople’s conversion, Christianity in Syria was a source of political contention for Rome that prompted the empire’s construction of temples to suppress Christianity. The Temple of Apollo in Baalbek (Lebanon) remains the most spectacular example. Other political tensions in the region were connected with local power players, such as the family of Palmyrene ruler Zenobia (fl. c. 240s–270s CE), whose loyalty to Rome wavered.

Zenobia, the daughter of a Palmyrene ruler in alliance with the Romans, rebelled against the capital and established her own empire. Surviving coins of the Palmyrene ruler Zenobia, minted in her name and that of her son rather than the Roman emperor, tell us how contested Syria was as a region that was simultaneously semi-Romanized in its political culture and semi-independent. Coins in her own name are inscribed with the title *S. Zenobia Aug* (*Septimia Zenobia Augusta*), while those in the name of her son Vaballathus read *Im. C. Vaballathus Aug.* (*Imperator Caesar Vaballathus Augustus*). The use of the Latin terms *Augusta* and *Augustus* represent explicit claims to be rulers on a par with the reigning Roman ruler Aurelian in Rome, whose name and title (*Imperator Aurelianus Augustus*) appear on older Palmyrene coins during her rule.

Following the emergence of Constantinople as the empire's eastern capital, the activities of the Arab Christian Ghassanid tribe in the region (c. 400s–600s) echoed the extent that frontier rulers oscillated between alliance with the Romans and rebellion against them. Following the expansion of Islam in the 600s, the Arab Muslim Umayyad tribe similarly made Syria a new center of political rule in friction with the earlier Islamic capital of Medina and the contemporary eastern Roman capital of Constantinople. Surviving art and architecture in Umayyad Syria, from mosaics to surviving palaces and mosques, similarly tells the story of an early Islamic-era Syrian geography that was still very intertwined with its Roman and Palmyrene political past.

The expansion of Islamic political dominion across the once Roman-held lands of the Middle East and North Africa occurred simultaneously with the growth of Frankish rule in Europe. For the eastern Romans based in Constantinople, the expansion of the Frankish kingdom in the 500s and 600s was complex. Surviving legal codes tell us how far Emperor Justinian was willing to go in order to recenter the Mediterranean world's politics around Constantinople rather than Italy. Justinian's *Pragmatic Sanction* of 554 saw the old civil diocese network replaced with two new exarchates: the Exarchate of Ravenna (*Exarchatus Ravennatis*), based in the Italian peninsula's north; and the Exarchate of Africa (*Exarchatus Africae*), based in Carthage along the Tunisian coast. The ecclesiastical diocese network, however, remained in place, with bishoprics like Ravenna slowly pushing Rome's bishopric, that is, the papacy, into the region's periphery.

The abilities of the bishop of Ravenna to look eastward to Constantinople rather than to the bishop of Rome for ecclesiastical leadership demonstrated Constantinople's political reach throughout the Italian peninsula. In the end, Justinian's ambitions exceeded the abilities of his military and diplomatic corps. While the goal was to pull Italy into Constantinople's sphere of influence, the bishop of Rome, that is, the papacy, managed to consolidate connections with the Franks in a process that culminated in the establishment of a distinct Frankish-aligned Papal State and the coronation of Frankish king Charlemagne with the new church-approved title of Emperor of the Romans. The coins of Charlemagne read, in full, *Karolus Imperator Augustus* (*Karolus Imp Aug*) and omitted *Romanorum* ("of the Romans"), potentially

out of caution against challenging the surviving eastern Roman emperor's own imperial claims to being "emperor of the Romans." The term *Romanorum* did appear in his documents, but in either case, the term *Romanorum* was simply absent from ancient imperial titles. Vespanian (r. 69–79 CE), for example, ruled in Rome as *Imperator Caesar Vespasianus Augustus*, with the titles *Caesar* and *Augustus* as well as other monikers—*princeps* (first) and *dominus*—being the typical corollary titles adjacent to *imperator* across the centuries between Caesar's rule and Odoacer's conquest.

In the end, however, neither the Franks nor the eastern Romans in Constantinople nor the rising Islamic kingdoms—stretching from Cairo into Sicily in the 800s—would be able to secure a long-term hold over Italy. In the many centuries since the fall of Rome (c. 476), ancient Roman cities had developed more elaborate systems of self-governance modeled after the ancient Roman Republic. Venice had a senate, which was part of a larger phenomenon of communes developing self-governing systems across the centuries of political change and turmoil after 476. By the 800s and 900s CE, many of these communes had declared independence from the Frankish kings and the local Frankish margraves (German: *markgraf*), and by the 1000s, the era of the Italian maritime republics was in fruition: the Republic of Pisa, the Republic of Genoa, the Republic of Venice, and the Republic of Florence among others.

At the level of text and archival documents, the way that these republics diverged in language is one of the most interesting stories of how the worlds of the former Roman heartlands simultaneously converged and diverged. On the one hand, Latin remained a key language of administration and culture that could be seen in Pisan texts from the Crusader era. *Carmen in Victoriam Pisanorum* (*Song on the Occasion of the Victory of the Pisans*), a mix of poem and chronicle, comes from this period and survives in the Albert I Royal Library in Brussels. Written in the aftermath of the Mahdia campaign, *Carmen in Victoriam Pisanorum* celebrates the heroism of Pisa's soldiers and their commitment to the faith. Its poet-chronicler author, likely a clergyman, describes the Genoese as having joined "the Pisans with great love; they do not care about earthly life (*de vita mundi*), or about their sons; [for] they give themselves to the dangers for love of the Redeemer (*pro amore Redemptoris*).” On the

other hand, many of these types of administrative texts and chronicles began to diverge from Latin in places like Venice and Florence.

The Venetian archives, including collections of ambassadorial notes like the *Dispacci degli Ambasciatori e Residenti Costantinopoli*, are largely written in Venetian language. Venetian was a prestige language of speech and writing that left its mark in Italy's history of theater. Some of the most important plays in Italian history were written in Venetian. In the end, however, the language of Florence in the era of the Medicis became the peninsula's premier prestige dialect in a cultural context where Rome, center of the Roman Catholic Church, was a center of cultural and diplomatic exchange among ruling circles with estates in the city. With cultural centers in Florence and Livorno, the Medicis were among the most influential ruling families of the peninsula, but by the 1800s, Napoleon's state-of-the-art armies had captured much of the Italian peninsula, Europe, and even North Africa's Ottoman-aligned kingdoms including Tunisia.

Perched just across the Sicilian Strait, Tunisia was once the center of the ancient Roman Empire's North African territories, and, in the 1800s, was still a center of Maltese and Italian commerce and culture. With the establishment of the French protectorates in Algeria (1830) and Tunisia (1881), French texts began to document the eclipse of Italian cultural currency across North Africa and Egypt amidst a rapid acceleration of Francophone cultures throughout the Mediterranean. From Tunis to Alexandria, archives including those of the Alliance Israélite Universelle documented the transformation of the former Duchy of Tuscany's Livorno-based Jewish communities from Italian- and Arabic-speaking cultures into French-speaking cultures. Still, Italian culture remained a prominent part of the region's high and popular cultures in part because of the activities of new arrivals from the Italian kingdom in cities like newly industrializing Alexandria, Cairo, and Istanbul.

The Dante Alighieri Society's archives tell us how all the Italian citizens who traveled to these cities worked in industries including architectural design, construction, and music. The Cairo Opera House was an outcome of this exchange, as were many of the architectural projects of late Ottoman Istanbul. The Dante Alighieri Society also documented two world wars and the rise and fall of a new Italian empire, when much of the Italian diaspora navigated

rapid changes in laws around citizenship and residency privileges across Italy, France, Egypt, and Turkey. Today, decades after the mass emigration of Italians to countries like France and the United States, what survives of Italian heritage in the Middle East and North Africa extends beyond texts, objects, and artistic architecture and includes something more global: memories preserved in music and film.

PREFACE

Italy and the Islamic World: From Caesar to Mussolini offers the first long-duration reconstruction of the Italian peninsula's forgotten millennia as a bridge connecting Europe with the Middle East and North Africa. Beginning with the rise and fall of the Roman Empire and the emergence of the Papal State, and with extensive analysis of the lives of the Pisans, Genoese, Venetians, Florentines, Livornans, the so-called Levantines (*gli levantini*), and the *Risorgimento*-era Italian citizens, *Italy and the Islamic World* traces the story of families from the Italian peninsula as they navigated culture and conflict in the shared pursuit of commercial exchange.

These centuries saw the Italian maritime republics emerge from the shadow of the Frankish kingdom (Francia, fl. 481–843), royal successors of the mighty Goths and Vandals who first captured the western Roman lands. By the Age of Exploration, the Republic of Venice and the Republic of Genoa could be seen building business connections from Seville to Istanbul in competition with the Medicis of Florence, legendary governors of the Duchy of Tuscany. By the nineteenth century, in the aftermath of Napoleon's conquests and the start of the Italian Unification (*Risorgimento*), Tuscany's port of Livorno became the cultural center of a global Italian-speaking diaspora that included Roman Catholics, Greek Orthodox, and Sephardic Jews. In the final decades of the Ottoman Empire, these Livornese networks connected western Italy with cities like Algiers, Tunis, Alexandria, and Istanbul.

But against the backdrop of competing nationalist pulls in cities like Paris and Alexandria, when the rising Italian kingdom lost much of its cultural influence around the Mediterranean, large segments of the Italian-speaking diaspora parted ways permanently with the peninsula as they began new lives as citizens of countries like Egypt, Turkey, France, and the United States. Many others returned to Italy in the aftermath of the Second World War to find a country that was still coming to terms with its ancient and medieval past.

1

ITALIANS IN THE EAST (*LEVANTE*) AND THE MAKING OF MODERN EUROPE



Figure 1.1 Istanbul's Galata Tower is an old Genoese tower in the city's Beyoğlu district. Beyoğlu is also known as Pera (Greek: Πέρα). In 1273, Byzantine Emperor Michael VIII Palaiologos granted the Republic of Genoa control over Pera in recognition of Genoa's support for the Byzantines against the Crusaders. Back in 1204, a Crusader army captured Constantinople and made it the capital of a short-lived Crusader kingdom (Latin Empire of Constantinople) that lasted until 1261.

Confluence and Conflict across the High Seas

In 1384, Florentines Leonardo Frescobaldi, Simone Sigoli, and Giorgio Gucci traveled to Egypt as part of an extended trip to visit the ports and sacred sites of the Middle East and North Africa. Their surviving accounts offer some of the most vivid European representations of North African and Middle Eastern cultures.¹ Frescobaldi was a diplomat in Tuscany. His trip to Egypt via Venice

took him, together with a large group of diplomats and pilgrims, to some of the most influential centers of culture and commerce across the eastern Mediterranean: Alexandria, Cairo, Gaza, Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Damascus, and Beirut. The maps they brought were dotted with historical churches and archaeological sites dating back to early Christianity and the ancient Roman era. Among the group's most interesting encounters was one with a dragoman (Florentine Italian: *dragomanno*) who worked in royal service in Cairo. At the time, dragomans were local diplomatic interpreters versed in European and Middle Eastern languages such as Arabic, Turkish, and Persian. When consuls and pilgrims from Europe traveled to Egypt, local authorities employed professional dragomans as diplomatic go-betweens and chaperones to help them navigate the city.

In this particular case, Frescobaldi's dragoman had a unique profile. The dragoman was a Venetian who learned Arabic and settled permanently in Cairo, where he lived and worked as a Muslim. The dragoman's wife, a Florentine, was also Muslim. Frescobaldi's dragoman worked specifically as the grand dragoman for one of the Mamluk-era (r. 1250–1517) sultans, which meant that the visit of Frescobaldi, Sigoli, and Gucci was a high-level affair. From a modern perspective, the sight of a Venetian–Florentine couple who were Muslim and spoke Arabic ought to have been striking to Frescobaldi, Sigoli, and Gucci. Surprisingly, Frescobaldi spoke of their encounter matter-of-factly. To him, their Venetian Muslim dragoman was simply “a renegade Venetian” married “to one of our Florentines,” suggesting that the phenomenon of Europeans living and working as Muslims in the Middle East and North Africa was not rare.²

Indeed, fifty years before Gucci and Frescobaldi's encounter with the Venetian polyglot, the Irish Franciscan friar Symon Semeonis similarly wrote in the 1320s that his two local interpreters in the Levant were “outwardly renegades.”³ One was a member of the Knights Templar organization who became Muslim and married locally. Another was a Roman friar who likewise became Muslim while in the Levant. Semeonis imagined that these interpreters were only “outwardly” Muslim in an apparent hope that they might still be Roman Catholic.

One factor that explains why cultural boundaries were so porous between people in the Italian peninsula, the Middle East, and North Africa was that these regions were all part of a single empire—namely, the Roman Empire—from the time of Julius Caesar (c. 50s BCE) until the fall of the Roman

heartlands to conquerors like the Vandals, Visigoths, Ostrogoths, and Franks (c. 500s CE). Both before and after the career of Julius Caesar, cities such as Carthage (Tunisia), Alexandria (Egypt), and Palmyra (Syria) were in commercial contact with European cities like Rome and Athens. This explains why ancient rulers of the Middle East and North Africa loomed large in ancient Greek- and Latin-language literature: Queen Dido (c. 700s BCE) of Tyre (Lebanon) and her Phoenician kingdom in Carthage (Tunisia), Queen Cleopatra (c. 50s BCE) of Alexandria (Egypt) and her Greco-Egyptian kingdom connected with Alexander the Great's conquests (c. 300s BCE), and Queen Zenobia (200s BCE) of the Palmyrene kingdom situated along the Roman-controlled northern sections of the Syrian–Arabian trade routes adjacent the legendary Via Traiana Nova route in Roman *Arabia Petraea*.

After the fall of Rome and expansion of the Paris- and Aachen-centered Frankish empire (Paris, c. 508–768; Aachen/Aix-la-Chapelle, c. 795–843), rulers like Charlemagne (c. 800s CE) and local governors like Matilda of Tuscany (c. 1000s CE) were keen to navigate continuing connections with the Middle East and North Africa for various reasons. Most important among them were commerce with merchants throughout Mediterranean ports, conquest for maritime control in the high seas, competition with Constantinople over Christian loyalties, territorial competition with the caliphates governing formerly Roman-held territories—the Umayyads of Damascus and Cordoba, the Fatimids of Cairo, the Abbasids of Baghdad—and the like.

The outcome was a degree of political fragmentation and flux that facilitated the rise of independent states in the Italian peninsula beyond the Frankish empire's direct rule: the massive Papal State stretching from Rome to Ancona on the Adriatic, the Venetian republic in the northeast, the Genoese republic in the northwest, the Amalfitan republic in the south, and others. Most of the maritime republics grew out of towns like Genoa that had become self-governing communes after the fall of Rome in 476, and they were never entirely under the direct control of the conquerors who eventually took over the Roman Empire's western lands – namely, the Visigoths, the Ostrogoths, the surviving eastern Romans of Constantinople, the Lombards, and eventually the Franks of the Frankish empire (Francia). It was out of those new republics, which modeled themselves after the ancient Roman Republic, that a new generation of diplomats and merchants emerged in search of new post-Roman trade agreements in familiar cities like Constantinople and Alexandria.

As was the case in the Italian peninsula itself, the administrative and popular cultures had shifted in those regional cities in the centuries since the fall of Rome. The result was the rise of polyglot merchants able to communicate in multiple varieties of vernacular Latin—French, Genoese, Tuscan, Venetian—as well as languages such as Greek, Turkish, Arabic, and Persian.

For merchants of the Italian peninsula, the importance of expertise in foreign languages grew out of the new administrative cultures that rose to prominence after the fall of Rome, from the increasingly Greek-speaking eastern Roman (Byzantine) administration of Constantinople to the Arabic-speaking Islamic caliphate administrations of Damascus, Cairo, and Cordoba. Venetian and Genoese diplomats began to conduct business not only in vernacular Latin and Greek, but also in Arabic and eventually in Turkish and Persian.

Against this backdrop, the activity of a Venetian–Florentine couple who were Muslim, spoke Arabic, and worked as translators in the service of the sultan was notable and maybe even remarkable to Florentine travelers like Frescobaldi, Sigoli, and Gucci. But it was not unheard of in the late 1300s on the eve of the Renaissance. At the time, Turkish had already become an important language of administration relevant to the business interests of Genoese merchants in Pera. In the decades before Constantinople was subsumed into Ottoman rule, Genoese merchants in the independently governed port city of Pera—site of the surviving Genoese tower in present-day Istanbul—were already conducting business in the former Ottoman capital of Bursa. They did so without paying import–export tariffs, as though they were naturalized Ottoman subjects of the Ottoman domains. And they eventually were naturalized when large segments of the Genoese population remained in and around Constantinople after it became the new Ottoman capital in 1453.

It was at this point when Turkish became a permanent part of the dragomans’ linguistic repertoire. The Ottomans were one of the Turkish principalities in western Anatolia that began to use Turkish, not just Persian and Arabic, as administrative languages. This linguistic choice was evocative of the earlier Timurid khanate (c. 1360–1507) of Central Asia, which used its own Uzbek-like Turkish dialect as a literary language (Chaghatai). The fact that the Medicis in Florence were operating a printing press in Arabic just a century later, namely, the *Typographia Medicea Orientale* (Medici Oriental Press), fits perfectly into these linguistic trends.

It was across these connected worlds of confluence and conflict that monarchs like the polyglot Frederick II (r. 1220–1250), Norman–Hohenstaufen king of Palermo and one-time head of the German “Holy Roman Empire,” could be seen speaking and writing Arabic fluently in his communications with Cairo-based Ayyubid sultan al-Kamil (r. 1218–1238) in Jerusalem. At the height of the Crusader era, Frederick II was one of the key patrons of Europe’s Arabic–Latin translation movement on the eve of the Medicis’ Renaissance-era activity in Florence (c. 1400s–1500s). His patronage of translators was part of a larger history of cultural transfer that saw Castilian Toledo and Norman Palermo become centers for the study of Greco-Arabic medicine and cartography in the lead-up to both the Renaissance (c. 1400s) and Age of Exploration (c. 1500s–1600s).

It was in this context that merchants and diplomats sometimes made a lifetime move towards what they thought of as the East (*Oriente*). At the peak of Ottoman–Habsburg rivalries in the reign of Spanish Habsburg King Philip II (r. 1556–1598), namesake of the Philippines, Spanish priest and one-time captive Antonio de Sosa (fl. 1538–1587) wrote about North African Muslims from Roman Catholic families in ways that evoked Frescobaldi’s observations centuries earlier. The friar encountered these Catholic-heritage European Muslims in the late 1500s in Ottoman Algiers, where he described them as “Turks by profession” (*turcos de profesion*). By this term, which foreshadowed the writings of Cervantes (c. early 1600s), De Sosa meant “all the renegades who, [despite being] of Christian blood and parentage, have of their own free will become Turks (*de su libre voluntad se hicieron Turcos*).” He even claimed that these “Turks by profession” were greater in number than the “Moors, Turks, and Jews of Algiers.”⁴ In other words, with the rise of Ottoman dominion throughout the Middle East and North Africa, Roman Catholics from Europe were moving to Ottoman-held lands and becoming Muslim in numbers that seemed – to the friar’s perhaps exaggerated observations – greater than the number of native Turkish-speaking Muslims (“Turks”) and Arabic-speaking Muslims (“Moors”).

By De Sosa’s lifetime, however, what may have been more common than the Italian peninsula’s Roman Catholics converting to Islam was a parallel phenomenon: families of the Italian maritime republics naturalizing as Catholic subjects of a Muslim sultan alongside larger Greek Orthodox communities who had naturalized previously. This phenomenon was seen above in the example



Figure 1.2 The military naval ensign used by the Italian navy on its flag points to Italy's continued memory of the global maritime republics. Clockwise from upper left to right is the Republic of Venice, Republic of Genoa, Republic of Pisa, and Republic of Amalfi. Amalfi, an early player in Cairo, lost its lead across the Middle East and North Africa to the Venetian and Genoese republics. Pisa was subsumed into the Republic of Florence, which in turn became part of the legendary Grand Duchy of Tuscany under the Medicis. The conquests of Napoleon brought a sudden end to many of the republics a century before the rise of a single Italian kingdom.

Source: https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Naval_ensign_of_Italy.svg, Public domain.

of the Genoese of Pera who became subjects of the Ottoman sultan after 1453. Many of these Genoese families were already linguistically Hellenized, living throughout the Aegean among largely Greek-speaking Orthodox populations. Their counterparts were Genoese who had naturalized as subjects of the Spanish and Portuguese royals, including Christopher Columbus' son Diego. One-time governor of the Indies based on the Caribbean island of Hispaniola, Diego's career was a testament to how Genoese mariners and merchants looked west and east for opportunities during the Iberian-led Age of Exploration and rising Habsburg–Ottoman rivalry in Europe, with the Italian maritime republics attempting to navigate this increasingly global world of transoceanic shipping.

The Italian Maritime Republics: Venice, Genoa, and Florence from the Age of Exploration to Napoleon

Confluence and Conflict between the Genoese and Venetian Republics

The Iberian-led Age of Exploration saw a major shift in European shipping patterns that dramatically challenged the dominance of Italian shipping in West–East exchange. Portugal and Spain were the centers of monarchy-supported shipping expeditions that successfully bypassed the Italian peninsula, the Middle East, and North Africa in pursuit of direct access to the Spice Islands (Maluku Islands, Indonesia). These islands were situated where the Indian Ocean meets the South China Sea and Pacific Ocean. The two kingdoms—Portugal and Spain—eventually developed two rival trade routes that began in the Atlantic. Spain developed the trans-Atlantic and trans-Pacific Seville–Acapulco–Manila route. Portugal secured the Lisbon–Goa–Macau route that went around the southern tip of Africa and across the Indian Ocean. Within fifty years, both kingdoms were conducting direct business with Beijing and Nagasaki and trading in commodities such as silks, precious metals, spices, and porcelain.

From the Italian maritime republics perspective, the development was tremendous. The Age of Exploration developed in the aftermath of the Almohad caliphate's territorial and naval losses in Iberia in the 1200s, when the Kingdom of Portugal expanded southward into Lisbon (Arabic: al-Ushbuna) and the rising Kingdom of Castile absorbed its Muslim client state, namely, the Emirate of Granada. The Italian maritime republics had a long history of business with the Almohads and the Nasrids in cities like Marrakesh and Granada, just as they did with the Roman Catholic kingdoms in cities like Barcelona. In fact, the loss of the silk industry in Granada was partly offset by the new northern silk industry in Barcelona built with Genoese help. It was this same Genoese presence that, in the 1400s, saw the rise of a Spanish and Portuguese military nobility descended from Christopher Columbus' son Diego stretching from Iberia to the Caribbean. The Venetians, in contrast to the Genoese, were less present in Spanish and Portuguese circles due to the Venetian republic's activities in the eastern Mediterranean: securing diplomatic connections with the rising Ottomans of Istanbul, building trade alliances with the Safavids

of Isfahan, conquering the Italian peninsula and Greek isles like the ancient Romans before them, and building a high-speed commercial traffic system.

This contrast in Genoese and Venetian activity could even be seen in shipping technology, which was a core driver of the Age of Exploration. Venice's mass-production of high-speed low-walled galley ships at the renowned Arsenale complex diverged from Genoa's growing preference for high-walled transoceanic cog ships at this time. It was this latter variety of shipping technology that allowed Spanish- and Portuguese-funded mariners to chart a shipping route across the Atlantic to the Caribbean and, during the expedition of Magellan, routes across the Pacific to from Acapulco to Manila. The contrast in shipping technologies pointed to the many ways that merchants and mariners from the Italian maritime republics built momentum in both international business and technology after the Renaissance in a way that was only truly interrupted by the shock of Napoleon's state-of-the-art military in the late 1700s.

What gave the Venetians an advantage in the Mediterranean was the special relationship they developed with the region's two most important regional players. The first were the Ottoman sultans, one-time competitors and ultimately conquerors of the surviving eastern Roman Empire of Constantinople. The second were the Safavid shahs, Muslim self-styled successors of the ancient Achaemenids and Sassanians and recent inheritors of the Iranian lands previously held by the Timurid khanate. Venetian activity in Ottoman Istanbul illustrates how much the Genoese had come to abandon their earlier attempts to build a sprawling territorial empire in the Mediterranean. It was a feat that the Venetians continued to pursue as they captured more and more territory on the Italian peninsula itself.

But the Venetians were not willing to abandon entirely the possibilities of the Age of Exploration to the new global empires of Spain and Portugal. With the rise of the Dutch Republic (est. 1581) and the United Kingdom (est. 1603), when the government-supported Dutch East India Company (est. 1602) and the British East India Company (est. 1600) began pushing the Spaniards and Portuguese out of Asian waters, the Venetians found new ways to capitalize on global trade networks. In a decision implemented by the Venetian state, the Venetians provided a variety of globetrotting merchant groups with access to the city center: Muslims from the Ottoman Empire,

Armenians from Safavid Iran, Aegean Greeks, Germans active in the cities of the Hanseatic League, and, most notably, Sephardic Jews and Jewish-heritage *conversos* (Jewish-heritage New Christians) fleeing the Spanish and Portuguese empires. The outcome was the Venice–Spalato–Istanbul trade route that crossed the Adriatic port of Spalato (Croatian: Split) north of Dubrovnik (Republic of Ragusa), and that saw the exchange of commodities like red pigment (cochineal) from the Spanish New World (Mexico) and Iranian silks used to create Venetian red velvet.

What limited the possibilities of Venice’s Venice–Spalato–Istanbul trade route was how easily its traffic was replicated by the other Italian republics and states. The Adriatic coastal city of Ancona, part of the Papal States, followed Venice’s lead by allowing—in competition with Venice—foreign merchants from Iberia and Ottoman Istanbul commercial and residency privileges. The result was the Ancona–Dubrovnik–Istanbul trade route that passed through the Republic of Ragusa (c. 1358–1808) and that was further south than the Venice–Spalato–Istanbul route. Interestingly, the popes involved in relaxing Ancona’s residency restrictions were citizens of the Florentine republic and, specifically, members of its most powerful ruling household: the Medici. The Medici household supplied four political administrators to the Roman Catholic Church who all rose through the ranks to become bishop of Rome, that is, the pope. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it was this same ruling Medici family of Florence that managed, by the 1600s, to outdo both Venice and Ancona in the very same game of building a two-way trade circuit with Istanbul by rebuilding the storied Florentine-held port of Livorno in Tuscany.

The Medici, the Republic of Florence, and the Duchy of Tuscany

The Florentines under Medici governance (c. 1434–1737) had been following closely behind the Genoese and Venetians in pursuit of commercial exchange with both the Ottomans of Istanbul and the Mamluks of Cairo (r. 1250–1517). The Medici were Tuscans like their Pisan compatriots half a millennium earlier during the First Crusade (1096–1099). During the Ottoman era of Istanbul (c.1453), they were poised to dominate exchange between Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa first via Florentine merchant networks and eventually via the port of Livorno. In the lead-up to transforming Livorno into Florence’s own international port for merchants

from all empires, the Medicis managed to cultivate Florentine relations with a variety of powers—Rome’s Papal State, Cairo’s Mamluk sultanate, Istanbul’s Ottoman sultanate—in order to rebuild Tuscany’s central position in global trade half a millennium after Pisa rose to prominence.

Having managed to serve as pope for an almost continuous and historically pivotal twenty-year period (1513–1534), the Medici family built an enterprising Florentine trade circuit during the early Ottoman period that connected Florence with the papal-held Adriatic port of Ancona. Florence’s connections with Ancona allowed the city access to the Ancona–Dubrovnik–Istanbul trade route. It was the Medici popes who played a key role in relaxing restrictions on residency for Ottoman subjects in Ancona, and by the end of the 1500s plans were underway to apply the same logic in the Medicis’ own ports. In a move that challenged both the Ancona–Dubrovnik–Istanbul and earlier Venice–Spalato–Istanbul route, the Medicis built a global trade center in Tuscany that would be on a par with Venice: Livorno.

Livorno: Tuscany’s First “Free Port”

By 1580, half a century after the Florentine republic became the more prestigious Grand Duchy of Tuscany with papal blessing, the Grand Duke of Tuscany Ferdinando I de’ Medici came up with a new plan that was even more profitable than pushing Florence towards the Ancona–Dubrovnik–Istanbul trade route: pulling the region’s trade diasporas to Tuscany itself, and specifically to the port of Livorno. Livorno had the disadvantage of being on the Italian peninsula’s western coast, as opposed to Venice and Ancona’s Adriatic location. At the same time, it shared an advantage with its northern neighbor Genoa: it looked out to northern and western Europe, which in the 1600s saw the rise of powerful Dutch and British trading operations.

Evoking nearby Pisa’s global heritage, and going further than Venice’s ability to attract foreign merchants, Ferdinando I declared Livorno a “free port” in 1580. That is, he allowed a variety of merchants—Greeks, Armenians, Jews, Muslims from the Ottoman sultanate (“Turks” in the charter), Muslims from Iberia and North Africa (“Moors” in the charter), and Protestants from the north—to conduct business in Tuscany without the burden of high taxation duties. Ferdinando de’ Medici additionally offered residency privileges, which in the 1600s and 1700s turned Livorno into an international city on a par with Istanbul and Venice.

To make Livorno more of an economic and cultural hub of the Mediterranean rather than a transitory site of exchange, groups like Sephardic Jews escaping the Spanish Inquisition as well as formerly Byzantine-era Greek Orthodox operating across the Venetian and Ottoman Aegean were welcome to remain permanently in Livorno, where they built churches and synagogues. Under Medici governance, the Grand Duchy of Tuscany became a veritable trade competitor of the sprawling Venetian republic, and Livornese Jewish networks in particular played a major role in bridging Tuscany with major trade emporia like Fez, Algiers, Tunis, and Alexandria.

In its heyday, however, Livorno ran into the same tumultuous outcome that impacted neighboring Venice and Genoa: the rise of Napoleon at the end of the French Revolution (1789–1799), and the Napoleonic armies' invasion of southern Europe. The spread of the Napoleonic armies throughout the early 1800s left a profound impact on the political and social networks of both the Italian peninsula and the worlds of North Africa across from it. From Middle Eastern and North African perspectives, the rise of Francophone North Africa was the most obvious outcome of France's rise to prominence in the early 1800s.

From the Italian peninsula's perspective, Napoleon's impact was both seismic and elusive. In the short term, the Genoese and Venetian republics came to a sudden and inglorious end in 1797. Paintings of the Venetian doge's resignation, dressed in a scarlet robe and descending the palace stairs for the last time, would evoke black and white photographs of the last Ottoman sultan saluting his guards as he left Topkapi palace in 1923. In the long run, the Napoleonic invasions of the northern Italian peninsula left the same type of enduring and elusive impact that drove the Ottoman Empire's nationalist movements. Specifically, it propelled far beyond Paris the French Revolution's language of anti-monarchism, parliamentary democracy, and liberal citizenship. Politically powerful Italian centers, including Genoa, Venice, Florence, and Livorno, became centers of local political and intellectual reforms that culminated in the rise of a unified Italian kingdom in 1863. This outcome shaped and was shaped by the Greek and Balkan nationalist movements across the Adriatic, which in turn shaped varieties of Ottoman, Turkish, and Arab nationalisms. One of the lesser known dimensions of this process in the Italian case was what happened in the Italian diaspora among the so-called Levantine Italians. While some went through a process of "becoming Italian," others lost their ties with the Italian peninsula.



Figure 1.3 Alexandria was one of the many places where Italians with recent and more distant connections to the Italian peninsula debated the rise of Mussolini-era fascism. Filippo Tommaso Marinetti (left), whose parents came to Egypt as legal advisors during Egypt's modernization era, left Egypt to become a formative player in the Italian literary and artistic movement known as futurism. Marinetti became a supporter of Mussolini's Fascist Party at a time when other Italian Alexandrians, including Fausta Cialente (right), were vociferous critics.

Sources: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Filippo_Tommaso_Marinetti#/media/File:FilippoTommasoMarinetti.jpg, public domain; <http://www.voxmilitiae.it/2016/12/fausta-cialente-il-destino-di-una-scrittrice-straniera-dappertutto>, public domain after fifty years.

Becoming Italian and the Debate in Rome about the Levantines

From Pisa and Genoa to Venice and Florence, and in the decades leading up to the Italian kingdom's establishment (est. 1861), families connecting the Italian peninsula with the ports of North Africa underwent a process of "becoming Italian" during the *Risorgimento* (Italian Unification). Tuscan-speaking Livornese Jews in early nineteenth-century Tunis, for example, founded schools where Italian was taught at a time of growing French–Italian rivalry for political influence in the region. At the same time, there one outcome of these post-Napoleonic reforms of the 1800s was even more elusive: as much as the *Risorgimento* movement appeared to unveil a shared Italian-ness hidden behind the peninsula's many political cultures and diverse social customs, it also magnified—both in the peninsula and abroad—a certain ambiguity over whether certain groups were more Italian than others.

This debate about who was truly Italian was a question fraught with complexities, and it played out long after the rise of a unified Italian kingdom. Among its most enduring outcomes was that many so-called Levantine Italians (*gli Italiani Levantini*) in the 1900s never returned to the homelands of their parents and grandparents, who immigrated across the Mediterranean in large numbers in search of work during the *Risorgimento* era. The “Levantine” diaspora included everyone from older generations of Tuscan-speaking Livornese Jews active in 1800s Tunis to Roman Catholic Lombards in 1900s Istanbul and Cairo. In Algeria and Tunisia, which became French protectorates in 1830 and 1881, respectively, Livornese Jews found themselves subsumed *en masse* into the linguistic and legal gallicization policies of the new governors who encouraged Francophone learning among Tuscan Jews. Jews from a wide variety of backgrounds, including Arabic-speaking Jews and Italian-speaking Livornans, became simultaneously French speakers and French citizens by virtue of new laws around education and citizenship.

A segment of Tuscans in the North African diaspora, in other words, increasingly became French in a growing and culturally multivalent French empire of the twentieth century that stretched as far as Hanoi in Vietnam. At the same time, in the decades leading up to Tunisia’s transformation into a French protectorate (1881) just a few years later, the Duchy of Florence was pushing Livornese Jews to naturalize in North Africa as subjects of the Tunisian bey after residency of only one to two years. In other words, throughout the Italian peninsula, a process of political and cultural border delineation was underway in the decades between Napoleon’s French Revolution-era occupation of the peninsula’s northern regions (*c.* early 1800s) and the declaration of a united Italian kingdom (1861). Livornese Jews, native speakers of the rising Italian national dialect and a group with deep transnational connections with Jews in North Africa, were among the first groups to navigate the outcomes of new post-French Revolution discussions of liberal citizenship—that is, citizenship defined not in terms of a communitarian identity (Livornese Jews, Livornese Greeks, Livornese Catholics) nor in terms of being the subject of a king or duke, but rather in terms of ideas about “equality” and democratic governance.

The French Revolution’s “liberty, equality, brotherhood” would permeate antimonarchist movements throughout the eastern Mediterranean in

the 1800s and early 1900s. That some Livornese Jews became French in the nineteenth-century diaspora, while one member of the community became the Kingdom of Italy's prime minister, points to how the outcomes of these nineteenth-century debates about being Italian were still in formation. Still, the case of diasporic Livornese Jews becoming French foreshadowed something that would happen in Ottoman Istanbul and Khedival Cairo and Alexandria: many would remain in the Middle East and North Africa and never return.

The phenomenon of families from the Italian peninsula living in the Middle East and North Africa lasted longest where the British Empire had its greatest influence: the cosmopolitan port cities of late Ottoman Istanbul and Khedival Alexandria (Egypt). In both cases, *Risorgimento*-era Italians resident in the cities in the late 1800s and early 1900s became subsumed into the expanding extraterritorial laws governing British and French foreigners. The result was complex: for many of the so-called Levantine Italians (*gli Italiani Levantini*) who arrived after Italian Unification, the diverse circumstances of their local residence, career pursuits, and marital choices meant that they—like their Genoese, Venetian, Florentine, and Livornan forebears in earlier centuries—acculturated to local milieus in ways that British officers and diplomats did not. Legally, however, Italian citizenship meant that they remained as technically foreign throughout the Middle East and North Africa as the British. Unlike the British, however, Italian acculturation to the cosmopolitan local milieu meant that not every Italian was willing to forgo the kind of business and residency privileges that foreigners were increasingly restricted from keeping. That is, moving into the tumultuous decades between the First and Second World Wars, Levantine Italians in early twentieth-century Istanbul and Alexandria were frequently in the complex position of being both culturally local and legally foreign, and the choice to leave or stay was mediated by this tension.

On the Ottoman side, the Levantines (*gli Levantini*) were deeply involved as artists, artisans, and business owners in the industrialization and development of the Ottoman capital for some fifty years after the establishment of Italy (*Regno d'Italia*). In the late 1800s, the legendary residence of the Venetian ambassador (*bailo*) became the site of the Italian embassy, which oversaw the affairs of Italians living in the city. For much of the community, however, their activities came to an abrupt end with the outbreak of the Italian–Ottoman war of 1911. By then, Italy was living out pretensions to become one of Europe's

Great Powers, jumping into an attempted conquest of Ottoman Libya (1911). The invasion led the Ottoman administration to fulfill its threat of responding with the expulsion of Italians resident in Istanbul and the Levant. However, for many of these Italians, like the Greeks of late Ottoman Izmir, there was another option outside the empire: Alexandria.

Egypt, especially Alexandria, saw the last large community of Levantine Italians moving into the 1952 revolution. Governed by the khedives and their administration, Egypt was nominally Ottoman and increasingly British-influenced in the late 1800s. The port city of Alexandria was legally and culturally pluralistic, with law and popular culture articulated in Italian, French, English, and Arabic. By the late 1930s, however, new reforms under the khedivate—now a constitutional monarchy—began to restrict extraterritorial privileges for foreigners, and the antimonarchist nationalist movement that carried out the 1952 revolution was already taking root. Alexandrian Italians, like their Greek neighbors, were faced with an interesting question: should they naturalize as Egyptians within Alexandria's cosmopolitan, international, and multiconfessional Muslim and Christian landscape? Alternatively, should they head to Italy, the economically struggling and politically turbulent home of their parents and grandparents? Might there be a middle position of remaining in the city and navigating the change in laws governing foreigners, particularly as the Italians and Greeks were not nearly as culturally foreign as the British and French?

To the surprise of the Italian consulate, many Italians in the late 1930s naturalized as Egyptians. The political and social landscape of both Italy and Egypt at the time makes this decision look less surprising in retrospect. For the many Italians who did not naturalize as Egyptians, however, the first of two major blows to the community occurred in the early 1940s: military conflict between Mussolini-led Italy and Britain in western Egypt.

At the time, Mussolini decided to invade western Egypt in continuity with Italy's short-lived experiment with being an imperialist power. In the eyes of the British side of Egypt's administration, Italians in Egypt were a suspect community. Many Alexandrian Italians were arrested and interned, including the father of singer Iolanda Gigliotti—better known as Dalida. Born in Cairo to Calabrian parents, Dalida was an actress in Arabic-language cinema until 1954, when she moved to France and cultivated a singing career in French, Italian, and Arabic well into the 1980s. Her father Pietro, a late arrival to Egypt

from Calabria in the 1920s, was among the many Italians interned despite having careers outside politics. Pietro was a violinist for Cairo's Khedival opera house. Dalida's mother Giuseppina, a seamstress, came to Cairo together with Pietro from their economically hard-hit town in southern Italy.

The episode of Britain's internment of Italians in Egypt in the 1940s, aimed officially at Alexandrian Italians who supported Italy's Fascist Party, was the first of two major blows to the last major community of Levantine Italians. The other came soon after the declaration of the Arab Republic of Egypt in 1952, which was a year before Dalida—Miss Egypt in the Miss Universe competition of 1954—moved permanently to France. The key policy change in the 1950s was rising president Gamal Abdel Nasser's nationalization of foreign-owned large and small businesses, which followed the tumultuous nationalization of the British-held Suez Canal. Underlying the policy shift was a synthesis of Egyptian nationalism, which had a long history in Egypt, with two new elements that had an economic and cultural effect across industries: the first was socialist-inspired economic reform, which was widespread in British and French colonial territories around the world. The second was pan-Arab nationalism. Since the late 1800s and early 1900s, Egyptian nationalists associated pan-Arab nationalism with the late Ottoman-era Syrian Levant and with the many Syrian Christian and Muslim émigrés living in Egypt since the late 1800s. By the 1950s, Egyptian nationalist Gamal Abdel Nasser argued that pan-Arab nationalism should be a key component of Egyptian nationalism. Egypt's 1952 revolution, which occurred shortly after the Syrian Arab Republic emerged from French Mandate Syria and Lebanon (1920–1946), identified the new Egyptian republic as the “Arab Republic of Egypt.” Its socialist policies were shared by newly independent Syria to the north.

By the end of the decade, Nasser began nationalizing large and small foreign-owned businesses as part of an attempt to lift help Egypt's largely Muslim and Coptic Christian countryside achieve upward social mobility. The reforms saw the disappearance of the country's British and French presence. Alexandria's Aegean Greeks expected to be excluded from nationalization policies given their century and a half role in building Egypt's industries under the khedives, and also given their participation in the Egyptian armed forces during the British invasion of Egypt following the Suez Canal dispute. The Italians had a similarly multigenerational role

building Egyptian industries and were widely seen as the most acculturated European minority to Alexandria and Cairo's Arabic-speaking milieu. In the end, neither the Greeks nor Italians were excluded.

From an Alexandrian perspective, the most striking outcome of the new Egyptian republic's policies was the trickling away of Alexandria's and Cairo's Greek and Italian communities throughout the 1950s and 1960s. The departure of the Italians and Greeks from the ancient port city of Alexandria, where Italian and Greek were heard alongside French and English throughout the 1800s and early 1900s, transformed a decidedly cosmopolitan city of the 1940s into a ghost of its former self by the 1970s. By then, France had just given up control of its North African and Levantine holdings, the British likewise withdrew from the region, and Europe saw the rise of a variety of new post-Second World War industrial centers: Bedford (England), Lyon (France), Milan, Munich, and others that grew in parallel with American centers like Detroit and Buenos Aires. With the pull of Mediterranean labor and talent to the north and west, including Italian talent from centers like Alexandria and Cairo, the millennium-long history of families from the Italian peninsula residing in the Middle East became a living memory.

Writing Western History in its Global Context

The Industrial Revolution and its Global Origins

For decades, the study of Italy's connections with the Middle East and North Africa has attracted the attention of writers interested in economic globalization and the nature of Europe's past, present, and future. One question related to the Industrial Revolution has been of particular interest: how did European centers like ancient Rome and medieval Paris, one-time capitals of the Roman Empire and Frankish empire (Francia), emerge in the twentieth century as global centers of industry and design. One answer traces a genealogy of progress that is entirely European: Italian and French industrialization in the twentieth century developed in dialogue with innovation in London. In the heyday of the global British Empire, London became a center of the Industrial Revolution built on well-funded advances in steam engine technology and mechanized mass production in factories.⁵ These advances, which were in continuity with the Renaissance and Scientific Revolution, facilitated England's industrial-era export of mass-produced commodities like ceramics,

tea, and textiles to new import markets across Asia. Paris and Rome, centers of the European Renaissance and Scientific Revolution, were the beneficiaries of these later advancements in London as European administrators consciously attempted to emulate the British in cities like Paris, Lyon, Rome, and Milan.⁶ By the late twentieth century, these French and Italian cities were centers of state-of-the-art innovations in technology and design, from multinational automobile manufacturers like Fiat (Turin) and Renault (Paris) to nanotechnology-driven textile innovators like Benetton (Ponzano Veneto near Venice).

But there was a certain complexity to this story of the British Industrial Revolution, one that points to origins that are as global as the British Empire itself. The type of ceramics, textiles, and teas that the British produced and exported to China and Japan were actually Western emulations of higher-cost commodities imported directly from China and Japan since the Age of Exploration, namely, Fujianese black tea, Japanese porcelain, Southeast Asian silks, and the like. In the case of tea, for example, the British East India Company successfully pushed the Dutch East India Company out of the tea import business by monopolizing access to Chinese tea exporters, but there were fundamental problems in satisfying European demand. The Qing-era Chinese government placed limits on tea exports in part because the British East India Company had nothing of value to sell back to Chinese tea exporters beyond contraband items like opium, which was illegal in China. The Chinese government kept a close watch over illegal opium imports in the decades leading up to the Opium Wars, when the Chinese government's destruction of an opium cargo sparked the start of British–Chinese military hostilities and British influence over Chinese economic policy in the late 1800s.⁷ Even before the Opium Wars, however, what allowed the British to get around China's supply limitations was certain technological innovations in the realm of botany and horticulture: the British East India Company managed to transfer the secrets of tea cultivation from Fujian to British India and build tea plantations within and across the British Empire using hybrid seeds, including the renowned Sino-Indian Darjeeling seed.⁸ They then, drawing on industrial steam technology, used machines to depart from the older handcrafted Chinese methods of cultivating, harvesting, and shaping small batches of tea. These technological innovations in horticulture and mechanized production allowed a move towards manufacturing machine-harvested and machine-processed black tea at scale all

across the plantations of British India. The same story of European innovation with global origins could be seen in how porcelain-like Staffordshire ceramics drew on the ceramics of Delft, which were in turn based on close studies of highly prized imported Chinese and Japanese porcelain with their sophisticated under-the-glaze design.

Western industrial innovations, in other words, developed in close dialogue with innovations to the east, and the same could be said for the mechanized technology associated with the steam engine. The steam engine was one of various engineering advancements in mechanical technology that impressed global observers and included mechanical firearms, which allowed the British invasion of China. Ironically, it was China where gunpowder and cannons were invented. And when Europeans invaded China, they noted in encounters with foot soldiers that the once mighty Chinese military had grown oddly outdated in both technology and strategy. The Japanese, meanwhile, were observing the firepower of European weapons technology with alarm despite being closely connected with Dutch medicine and military innovations.

This technological gap between the West and the so-called East points to an earlier era when European science, once behind its counterparts in cities further east, began to advance ahead with engineering feats that facilitated the Industrial Revolution. For global historians, those centuries are the era of the Latin-language Renaissance and Scientific Revolution, when Newton's physics made an unprecedented set of advances that were central to modern steam-driven and electrical technology. It is across these centuries where Europe's forgotten dialogue with its neighbors in the East is most obvious. Global historians have documented in detail how the massive momentum of Latin language during the Scientific Revolution epitomized by Newton drew directly on the Arabic–Latin translation movement of Toledo and Palermo, which in turn drew on the Greek–Arabic translation movement of Damascus and Baghdad.⁹ Global historians have realized, in other words, that advancements during the British Industrial Revolution were borne out of its global exchange with neighbors near and far, and that an understanding of the present and future of this innovation requires the same global approach.

In the case of Rome and Paris, one-time centers of the bygone Roman and Frankish empires, historians with a more global perspective have discovered that these cities' modern transformations were as much a product of innovations in

the British Industrial Revolution as they were the countless innovations central to the French and Italian Renaissance: glassblowing and textile manufacturing in Aleppo under the Umayyad caliphate, surgery and pharmacology in Alexandria under the Fatimid caliphate, shipbuilding and weapons manufacturing in Baghdad under the Abbasid caliphate, cartography and navigation technology in Mamluk Cairo, the chemical extraction methods of aromatic and medicinal oils in Ottoman Arabia and East Africa, the spice-processing techniques of Southeast Asia's sultanates, the gunpowder and silk manufacturing of China; and the ceramics and tea cultivation of Japan. It is this global picture of the world of Europe and its neighbors that this book seeks to explore, and in doing so, it takes a specifically maritime approach to understanding global geographies and trade routes that passed through Italy.

Towards a Maritime Understanding of Italy's Past and Present

French historian Fernand Braudel was among the first modern researchers to investigate an understanding of Europe's past and present through a global maritime lens, and he did so in continuity with past writers who connected geography with politics and culture.¹⁰ From Anatolian writer Herodotus in Greek to Andalusian writers Ibn Khaldun and Ibn al-Khatib in Arabic, chroniclers and political philosophers have observed for centuries how the sea links disparate regions together in a way that shapes politics and human behavior: the Baltic Sea linking Scandinavia with present-day Russia, the North Sea around the British Isles and coastal Iberia, the Atlantic Ocean linking the Iberian and West African coasts, the Black Sea connecting the Greek isles with the Crimean Peninsula across the Sea of Marmara, and the most storied of all in European history, the Mediterranean Sea with its links to the Adriatic Sea, Aegean Sea, and Sicilian Strait.

According to Braudel's approach, an understanding of Europe's past and present meant understanding the innovations of merchant networks who operated across these seas. There was, for example, the Hanseatic League with their high-sided carrack ships in the North Sea and Baltic Sea ports. Their activities linked cities like London and Amsterdam with Bergen, Copenhagen, and Stockholm, regions once dominated by the Vikings and Normans. For Braudel, these networks gave northern Europe a story that was clearly distinct from developments further south along the Mediterranean and Adriatic seas, where low-sided, high-speed Venetian galleys raced up and down the Italian

and Balkan coastlines in pursuit of commerce and conquest across very different linguistic worlds: vernacular Latin, Slavic languages, Greek, Turkish, and Arabic. At the same time, Braudel recognized that these histories were not entirely disconnected, and that understanding European history required investigating innovations where these trade routes met.

In the case of transnational innovations in laws around trade and residency, Venetian archives and architectural history tells us that the innovation of the *fondaco*, that is, the warehouse-inn, played a key role in allowing global travelers short-term access to Italian cities. Short-term residency privileges via the Venetian *fondaco* offered merchants from the Middle East and North Africa access to southern European markets while providing the city with profits from taxable imports and exports. The Venetian *fondaco* drew on the Middle Eastern and North African *funduq*, which served a similar function in allowing Venetian merchants access to Asian markets. German traders from the north were similarly welcomed in Venice at the German warehouse-inn (*fondaco dei tedeschi*), where they were able to do business with Turkish-speaking merchants staying at the Turkish warehouse-inn (*fondaco dei turchi*).¹¹ The intersection of these same trade routes further west along the Iberian Atlantic is what facilitated innovation among the Genoese, who moved away from the low-sided galleys popular in Venice in favor of the high-sided carracks used by the Genoese. It was this type of ship was used by Genoese mariners Christopher Columbus and his son Diego—one-time Admiral of the Indies in Santo Domingo (1506–1526)—to traverse the treacherous Atlantic Ocean. Tracing the origins of these shipping innovations, historians have rediscovered an encounter between medieval European mariners with those of the Middle East and Southeast Asia. Sailing back and forth across the Indian Ocean, merchants from the Arabian Peninsula trading in Chinese commodities moved away from the ancient steering oar in favor of the rope-operated rudder, which in turn paved the way for modern mechanical rudders on boats and airplanes. Italian shipping mastered techniques from both West and East, building on innovations seen in the Hanseatic League’s cog ships, Roman galleys, and Arabian dhows in the construction of their own state-of-the-art vessels. Western innovation, in other words, is an outcome of centuries of global encounters, and the past and present trajectory of those encounters is best understood through a global understanding of history.

1 Since Braudel, a variety of historians have applied this maritime approach
2 to understanding the past and present. Janet Abu-Lughod's analysis has
3 shown how the world's West-centered political and economic ascendancy is
4 in fact a very modern phenomenon, making the resurgence of centers in Asia
5 unsurprising.¹² Andre Gunder Frank and Peter Borschberg have shown how
6 the biographies and innovations that make up modern Europe and Asia were
7 in fact borne out of encounters centered especially in Southeast Asia in cities
8 like Singapore.¹³

9 Taken together, all these works illustrate that just as modern Europe can be
10 understood only in the context of its past trade connections throughout the
11 world, so likewise the story of Italy's present and future appears most clearly
12 when examining the peninsula's historical links with the Middle East and
13 North Africa. These connections are ancient and go back to the early centuries
14 of the Roman Empire, when Roman Carthage and the province of Roman
15 Arabia linked global trade between West and East. It is in this world where this
16 book's story begins in a saga about Italians in the East (*Oriente*) and the mak-
17 ing of modern Europe.

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AFTER CAESAR: THE ROMAN EMPIRE AND ITS ARABIAN FRONTIER



Figure 2.1 Christian Bedouin in Jordan (right) have been written about for centuries because of their cultural connections with multiple histories that link the ancient Roman Empire with its Arabian frontiers around Petra: the childhood of Roman emperor Philip in Awrantis (Arabic: Hawran) in Arabia Petraea, the culture of early Aramaic- and Arabic-speaking Christianity where Philip came of age, the childhood of Roman imperial matriarchs Julia Domna and Julia Maesa of Emessa (Arabic: Homs), the Christian Arab Ghassanid tribe once in alliance with the eastern Romans in the sixth century, the seventh-century Muslim Arab tribes that secured the Ghassanids' counter-alliance, the north-south trade routes from Palmyra and Petra to northwest Arabia (Hijaz) during the revolution of imperial ally-turned-rebel Queen Zenobia of Palmyra, and in the days of Julius Caesar and Cleopatra (c. 100s BCE), the ancient Nabatean kingdom associated with Petra's most famous archaeological site (left). The culture and history of Christian Bedouin serve as a reminder of how northern Arabia's deserts and oases, like the fertile south, were the crossroads of global exchange long before the Age of Exploration and even before the Islamic caliphates. In the early decades of Roman rule in Petra, the mausoleum of Nabatean king Aretas IV (Nabatean Arabic: Haritha) was built in a Hellenistic style that drew on the region's even older connections with Alexander the Great's conquests (c. 300s BCE), and it has stood in present-day Jordan across all of these centuries as a testament to the Levant and northern Arabia's continuous ties with centers to the west—Rome, Athens, Alexandria, and Carthage.

Sources: <https://tinyurl.com/42htwtbm> & Library of Congress, public domain; <https://www.loc.gov/item/2003653622>, public domain; <http://www.mariamhotel.com/family.html>, public domain after fifty years.



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EPILOGUE

MEMORIES OF THE LEVANT IN EXILE

What kept the memory of Italians in the Middle East alive were both surviving institutions and shops—Groppi’s chocolatier in the heart of present-day Cairo—as well as a smattering of Levantine Italian families living either locally or in exile. In Egypt, Dalida’s legacy in Arabic-language film and music remains a prominent part of the Egyptian national heritage, particularly as her most famous Arabic-language song—“My Beautiful Homeland” (Egyptian Arabic: *bilwa ya baladi*)—remains a widely known tribute to her country of birth. It was recorded relatively recently in 1979. She even gave an interview in Italian-accented Arabic for Egyptian television around the same period, frequently mixing in French words for Arabic.

Since the 1980s and 1990s, the Egyptian media has more broadly celebrated the memory of Alexandria’s mid-century past. The omnipresence of black-and-white Arabic-language “golden era” Egyptian cinema, for example, has preserved the legacy of those Arabophone Alexandrian actors (c. 1920s–1970s) who were fully or maternally Italian. Stefan Rosti was the son of an Austrian ambassador to Egypt and an Alexandrian Italian mother, who insisted on staying in Egypt upon the departure of her husband and who enrolled her son Rosti in local Arabophone schools. Nadia Gamal was the stage name of Alexandrian actor and dancer Maria Cariadis, who was born to an Italian mother and Greek father and who popularized various “eastern” dances (*raqs sharqi*) in Egyptian and Lebanese cinema. Rushdy Abaza, ubiquitous in black-and-white and color



films of the 1950s–1970s, was the son of an Alexandrian Italian mother who married a member of the prominent Circassian–Egyptian Abaza family. Egyptian documentaries since the 1980s with an overlay of mid-century nostalgia frequently recount the stories of these actors and their lives in cosmopolitan 1940s-era Alexandria and Cairo. That Alexandrian exiles born in the 1930s were only in their fifties in the 1980s meant that their stories, as told in these widely circulating documentaries, remain as vivid as depictions of Italians and Greeks in mid-century Egyptian films. There is also the handful of Greek families still resident in Egypt with their bilingual millennial offspring as well as the millennial grandchildren of Italian mixed marriages. Together with Egypt’s Armenian population, much of which counts late Ottoman eastern Anatolian refugees in its ancestry, Egypt’s visual culture and lived experiences offer a vibrant memory of the country’s mid-century past and its once large Italian demographic

Further north in Istanbul today, one of the last Levantine Italian families can be seen pondering its legacy and identity in an interview with an Italian news agency. One of its youngest Generation-Z members, bilingual in Italian and Turkish, wonders what the right answer is when asked: “Where are you from?” Is the answer, “I am Italian” in accordance with heritage, or is it “I am Turkish” because of birthplace. “I just explain my background and people find it . . . interesting!” The fact that an explanation is even warranted in Turkish public life suggests the obvious: that the picture of Italians and Greeks perfectly straddling multiple sociocultural worlds in the port cities of Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, and Turkey has become, today, a kind of charming oddity. In the two millennia spanning the history of the Roman Empire and the Italian republics, however, it was far closer to the norm.